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EVILS OF AUTO THEFT ANGER NEWARK'S MAYOR

Mayor Sharpe James today called on law enforcement officials to put "their full weight behind apprehending car thieves who continue to mow down unsuspecting pedestrians."

At the same time, James urged judges and state legislators "to increase penalties and fines against these individuals."

The Mayor spoke angrily about the "evils of car theft," upon learning that a young child had been seriously injured when she was hit by a stolen car on Bergen Street yesterday.

Three-year-old Sharaya Childs of Lehigh Avenue was struck by the stolen 1987 Oldsmobile at 3:40 p.m. as she was crossing Bergen Street at Mapes Avenue. She remains in critical, but stable condition at United Hospitals.

Donnell Rogers, 29, of South 17th Street, the driver of the stolen car, has been charged with possession of a stolen auto and aggravated assault. His passenger, George Wooten, 24, of Stratford Place was charged with possession of a stolen auto.

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"It's bad enough when we have juveniles involved in these criminal acts, but here we have two adults showing total disrespect for the rights and properties of others and more importantly endangering the lives of innocent, unsuspecting pedestrians. They should be given the harshest penalties possible, especially since they are adults," stated James.

But, auto theft is no less a severe crime when juveniles are involved, claimed the Mayor, who noted that he drives the newly paved city streets, including Bergen Street, and sees the marks left by youthful drivers doing "doughnuts."

James underscored the frustration faced by public officials in trying to curb car theft. "Government cannot do everything. And, we cannot be surrogate parents!

"Where are the parents when these youngsters are out at three o'clock in the morning joy riding and doing doughnuts? Adults need to take responsibility for their own behavior and that of their children or we will continue to watch innocent victims killed, maimed and injured by stolen vehicles," he asserted.

James praised the efforts of the auto theft task force, which has been able to reduce auto theft markedly since it was formed last year. However, he maintained, "The only way that we can abate this problem is for the community to join forces and show these few hoodlums that car theft will no longer be tolerated in Newark."